

**Washington, D.C.** - Rep. David Price (NC-04) responded today to the escalation of the conflict involving Israel and Hezbollah militants operating in Lebanon. Price was in Beirut, Lebanon only two weeks ago, meeting with reformers within the Lebanese parliament who are seeking to strengthen parliamentary independence and authority. Price has also received numerous calls from Triangle residents who are trapped in Lebanon or who have relatives or friends attempting to escape the country.

Price's speech, as prepared, is included below. The remarks were included during debate of a House resolution (H.Res.921), condemning the recent attacks by Hezbollah against the State of Israel and supporting the Israeli response.

## **Remarks on H. Res. 921**

**July 19, 2006**

Mr. Speaker, I address my colleagues in support of H. Res. 921 but acutely aware of its shortcomings.

Nearly two years ago, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the disarmament of all armed militias in Lebanon. As Lebanon's Cedar Revolution has brought new pro-democratic forces into power, one group has defied the world's mandate: Hezbollah. Hezbollah has justified its defiance by claiming to be a legitimate resistance against Israel's occupation of a small parcel of land in Syria, adjacent to Southern Lebanon, called Sheba Farms. It has tried to straddle the fence, claiming political legitimacy by participating in democratic elections and the Lebanese government, yet refusing to disarm and adding to its arsenal of rockets and other weapons.

Hezbollah's decision to kidnap two Israeli soldiers and kill three others – without provocation – and to launch rockets deep into Israel belie its claims to legitimacy and reveal its true mission: fighting not for Lebanon, but for its own interests, and those of its patrons in Iran and Syria.

No nation should be expected to tolerate a situation in which a terrorist organization bent on its destruction has free rein to ignore established borders through ground attacks or air strikes. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis are living in constant fear of deadly rocket attacks. I join with my colleagues in strongly supporting Israel's right to defend its sovereignty and its citizens.

The human toll of this conflict has also been frightful on the Lebanese side of the border. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of innocent lives have already been lost. Hundreds of homes housing innocent Lebanese citizens have been destroyed, and tens of thousands of families have been displaced. The Lebanese people, like the Israelis, are living under a dense cloud of fear and danger.

Our own citizens, too, have suffered from this violence. Over the last few days, I have received calls from tearful fathers with young daughters stuck in the hills of Lebanon with no way out; from families stuck in Beirut on vacation; from relatives with Lebanese family members killed in the conflict. We must remember the suffering of these innocent citizens, caught by chance in the storm of war.

As Israel faces the imperative of disabling Hezbollah, it must do all it can to obey the moral imperative of protecting the innocent, though it is an imperative we know is wholly disregarded by Hezbollah. The enemy here is not the Lebanese people. And the enemy is not the Lebanese government, which is led by a reform coalition that continues to fight against Syrian domination. The real enemy here is Hezbollah.

Our ultimate need is for a stronger, not weaker, Lebanese government. What sense does it make, for example, to demand more vigorous action against terrorists by the Lebanese Army, and then proceed to destroy that Army's barracks?

Our country's role must be to work for an end to this conflict that is both swift and just. Let us harbor no illusions: a settlement that allows Hezbollah to remain intact and merely postpones this fight until another day is not an acceptable option. We must require Hezbollah to disarm permanently and guarantee that Hezbollah will no longer threaten Israel or Lebanon. That will likely require the establishment of an international peacekeeping presence.

We must also work for a resolution that preserves the promise of the Cedar Revolution and

empowers those Lebanese leaders who seek reform and democracy in their country. I recently returned from a mission to Beirut with the House Democracy Assistance Commission, which is working with Lebanese Parliamentarians as they seek to establish an independent and effective representative body. Our Commission met with many of the reformers who, in a stunning victory, won a majority of seats in the Parliament in the 2005 Cedar Revolution. While key positions in the government, including the Presidency, are still controlled by those who would do the bidding of Syria, democracy has a foothold in Lebanon – the most significant foothold for democracy in the entire Middle East, outside of Israel. We must not allow the current conflict to destroy that foothold.

To bring about such a resolution, the United States must dramatically increase its engagement in the region. As the conflict has unfolded, we have watched the international community react with promising diplomacy. The United Nations, our allies in Europe, and key actors in the region – Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia – have rushed forward with mediators, ceasefire proposals, and calls for international peacekeepers. Even the Arab League, too often silent in the face of past attacks against Israel, is working to convene an emergency summit to deal with the crisis. But where has our own Administration been? As one commentator recently wrote, "the world's sole superpower is also its only no-show."

With so much at stake for our national security interests in the region, the Bush Administration's lack of engagement is troubling. But it is not surprising. This Administration has taken a hands-off approach to the area, at great cost to the prospects for peace. It has allowed the Road Map for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to wither on the vine. It has failed to sufficiently support the moderate Palestinian leader Abu Mazen, watching as Hamas capitalized on his political struggles. And, after trumpeting the gains of the Cedar Revolution, it has done too little to actually support the fledgling reform movement in Lebanon. With the Administration's gaze still fixed on Baghdad, the tensions that have led to the current conflict mounted unchecked.

Mr. Speaker, the current crisis demands decisive leadership. Secretary Rice should go to the region sooner rather than later, working with the international community toward a resolution to the conflict that guarantees Israel's security, permanently disarms Hezbollah, and supports the development of democracy in Lebanon. If we are to truly support Israel, we must do far more than the resolution before us suggests.

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